

Finance and Public Administration Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

5 February 2026

Thank you for giving Enlighten the opportunity to give evidence on public administration as part of the Committee's work creating a legacy report.

Enlighten would agree with a lot of the Committee's report into public administration and effective government decision making, especially with regard to issues such as managing public expectations; the importance of transparency and accountability; and the need for greater focus on the long term.

Against the backdrop of the committee's previous work there are a couple of additional issues that we would like to pick up, some of which will be of more relevance than others to the committee's thinking, but we believe also have an impact on policy delivery – data & outcomes; trust & the implementation gap; and scrutiny.

Data & outcomes

The importance of robust data when it comes to measuring outcomes cannot be overstated. We are aware that the National Performance Framework website is currently archived, with reform being carried out, and await the new work with interest.¹ However, we are concerned about the lack of meaningful data upon which to evaluate outcomes in a number of areas, alongside a tendency to focus more on inputs over outcomes.

For example, Professor Lindsay Paterson has written extensively for our Commission on School Reform on the lack of data in education, while Des McNulty's report on Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland² cautioned that measures aimed at reducing child poverty needed to be carefully examined for their effectiveness, adding that we must do better at understanding outcomes as well as celebrating inputs.

A specific example would be the policies around free bus travel for the under-22s and over-60s. These bus passes are often celebrated as great Scottish political achievements. However, while the policies bring huge benefits if you live somewhere like Edinburgh where there is a comprehensive and reliable bus service, too many places in Scotland do not have such coverage.³ Indeed, some school pupils, even in urban areas, cannot access bus services to get to school on time.⁴ The bus pass is no

¹ [National Performance Framework - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/national-performance-framework)

² [Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland: Striking the Right Balance - Enlighten](#)

³ [Last bus home to Glentworth leaves five minutes after first one arrives - BBC News](#)

⁴ ['Kids in danger' on 60mph road after school bus scrapped as parents launch petition - Daily Record](#); [Parents 'disgusted' as council propose to scrap school bus service | Glasgow Times](#)

guarantee of public transport provision, but focusing on the input can obscure the problems with outcomes.

Enlighten believes more needs to be done to scrutinise delivery, especially in the face of shrinking budgets, to ensure that the policies enacted are the most effective way of helping those most in need. This requires data, analysis, evaluation, and crucially a willingness to accept that not all policies will be effective and that when the information changes, it is important that policy changes too.

There are a number of portfolio areas in Scotland which are badly in need of reform. We need far more courage to try out different approaches. Some will work, some won't, and we need the data and evaluation to analyse those results. Too often there appears to be a fear of being wrong, which results with us being stuck in a failing status quo. Such an approach takes courage and humility, but Scotland badly needs that.

Trust and the implementation gap

The committee's report noted that "systematic policy-making aspirations are unhelpful if they encourage unrealistic expectations".

We would suggest that there is a problem around public expectations in Scotland, which undoubtedly impacts on trust in politics and the Scottish Parliament. But those "unrealistic" expectations are also part of our inability to be honest with the public about the scale of some of the challenges we are facing and why difficult decisions are needed.

For example, the policy of "free personal care" can leave the public with an expectation that when they require social care they will be able to access it free-at-the-point-of-need, just as they do with health care. But that isn't the case. Indeed, polling carried out by the Diffley Partnership, commissioned by Enlighten for our health conference in October 2025, showed that only 42% of the public understood how social care was funded and delivered.⁵

There have also been many issues which have had strategies, consultations and policies developed, but failed at implementation. Fifteen years ago the Christie Commission recommended a far greater focus on prevention and early intervention. We are still talking about it as a priority, but have collectively failed to deliver.

The Scottish Government recently closed its latest consultation on reforming council tax – everyone agrees the tax is unfair and out of date, but again we have collectively failed to reform.

Scrutiny

Effective public administration requires effective scrutiny and opposition – it is not just a job for government, but also for the Scottish Parliament.

⁵ [NEW NHS POLLING RELEASED AHEAD OF MAJOR HEALTH CONFERENCE - Enlighten](#)

Enlighten has published a number of articles and reports on this issue, including from MSPs.⁶ There have now been several calls from different parties, and others, on the need to improve the committee system at Holyrood. In particular, the suggestion of directly electing conveners in order to enhance the status of the role and help separate the committees from the political parties has been mentioned by many, including by the Commission on Parliamentary Reform which reported nearly ten years ago. This is an example of the Parliament creating its own implementation gap. Reform to the committee system should be an easy fix and a priority in the next Parliament.

Finally, while we appreciate that local government reform is not an issue for the Committee, we would want to highlight the role of councils in the delivery of public administration. Part of the problem around expectations and the implementation gap is undoubtedly a result of the relationship between central and local government. It is nearly three decades since local government reorganisation and, despite the creation of the Scottish parliament and subsequent devolution of additional powers to it, there has been no review of the capabilities or structures of councils by the Scottish Government. There needs to be a discussion about what the role is for the centre, but we need to recognise that if we are to improve outcomes in Scotland, whether that is in education, poverty, housing or other areas, local government is key to that success.

We recently published an article by Sean Duffy, Chief Executive of the Wise Group⁷ which powerfully summed up the problem with public administration in Scotland at present:

“Scotland does not lack policy ambition. If anything, it suffers from oversupply. Public Service Reform. Christie. Whole Family Support. No Wrong Door. Trauma-informed systems. Community empowerment. Place-based working. Integration. Co-design. Prevention spend.

“The language is impressive. The frameworks are sophisticated. The documents are polished. The conferences are busy. But beneath the rhetoric, the incentives tell a different story.

“Budgets remain siloed. Accountability remains vertical. Risk is still punished rather than supported. Short-term funding dominates. Outcomes are discussed but rarely structurally enforced. Frontline autonomy is praised but tightly constrained. Leaders speak the language of collaboration while defending organisational territory behind closed doors.”

If we want different outcomes, we need to start taking a different approach.

Yours sincerely,
Alison Payne
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⁶ [A Blueprint for a More Effective Scottish Parliament](#); [Devolution at 20 - Enlighten](#); [Everyone agrees that Holyrood needs change, so why isn't it changing? - Enlighten](#)

⁷ [Scotland's public services are still "living within the lie" - Enlighten](#)